

5000 West

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Where Valor Proudly Sleeps... Tomb of the



A patriotic ceremony honoring the service and sacrifice of America's military veterans is scheduled for Veterans Day at Arlington National Cemetery in Washington, DC. The Honorable Anthony J. Principi, Secretary of Veterans Affairs, will host this year's event, which marks the 51st observance of Veterans Day on these hallowed grounds.

The awesome responsibility of both guarding the Tomb of the Unknown Soldiers and escorting deceased Army service members to their final rest, is that of the "Old Guard" (3rd U.S. Army Infantry). This regiment is one of the oldest and most respected infantry regiments in the United States Army. It also serves as the Army's ceremonial unit, and this well-trained regiment is responsible for the protection of Washington, DC.

There is tradition and reason for every move these elite sentinels make as they guard the Tomb of the Unknown Soldiers.

The guard takes 21 steps during his walk across the Tomb to replicate the twenty-one-gun salute, the highest honor given any military or foreign dignitary. He also hesitates 21 seconds after his about face to begin his return walk. Guards are changed every thirty minutes, twenty-four hours a day, 365 days a year.

The rifle is carried on the shoulder away from the tomb. After his march across the path, he executes an about face and moves the rifle to the outside shoulder. Wet gloves are worn to prevent the guard from losing his grip on the rifle.

Both genders may apply for the privilege of duty at the Tomb. The current Commander of the Guards is Cpt. Carrie Wibben. The applicant must be between 5' 10" and 6' 2" tall and waist size cannot exceed 30 inches. Other requirements of the Guard: They must commit two years of life to guard the tomb, live in a barracks under the tomb and cannot drink any alcohol on or off duty for the rest of their lives. They cannot swear in public for the rest of their lives and cannot disgrace the uniform or the Tomb in any way.

After two years, the guard is given a wreath pin that is worn on their lapel signifying they served as guard of the tomb. There are only 400 presently worn. The guard must obey these rules for the rest of their lives or give up the wreath pin.

continued

Unknown Soldiers

Veterans Day ceremony recognizes all veterans

All are invited to participate in the traditional Veterans Day ceremony on Thursday at 10:30 a.m. in the Medical Center chapel. Music will be provided by the VA Choir under the direction of Shep Crumrine.

Patients may view the ceremony live in their rooms and lobby areas on channel 34. After the ceremony, U.S. Cellular will offer free phone calls to veterans in the south lobby until 1 p.m.

The story of Veterans Day on the History Channel

The Department of Veterans Affairs, the Department of Education and the History Channel have collaborated on the creation of "The Story of Veterans Day," a youth-oriented documentary that will be broadcast Veterans Day on the History Channel.

"The Story of Veterans Day" is the fourth installment in a series called "History of the Holiday," which explores the meaning and origin of national holidays. VA provided historical information and footage to the History Channel and worked with the Department of Education on its outreach efforts to veterans.

The 30-minute program, which examines the meaning and origin of Veterans Day, will air nationally on Thursday (Nov. 11) on the History Channel at 7 a.m. and 1 p.m. Milwaukee time.

Further information on Veterans Day is available at www.va.gov/vetsday

Tomb of the Unknowns (continued)

The first six months of duty a guard cannot talk to anyone, nor watch TV. All off duty time is spent studying the 175 notable people laid to rest in Arlington National Cemetery. A guard must memorize who they are and where they are interred. Every guard spends five hours a day getting his uniforms ready for guard duty.

In 2003 as Hurricane Isabelle was approaching Washington, DC, our US Senate/House took two days off with anticipation of the storm. On the ABC evening news, it was reported that because of the dangers from the hurricane, the military members assigned the duty of guarding the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier were given permission to suspend the assignment. They respectfully declined the offer, "No way, Sir!" Soaked to the skin, marching in the pelting rain of a tropical storm, they said that guarding the Tomb was not just an assignment; it was the highest honor that can be afforded to a serviceperson. The tomb has been patrolled continually, 24/7, since 1930.

Last Letters from Home: Voices from the Battlefields of Iraq

This hour-long presentation will air Veterans Day on HBO at 8 p.m., repeated at 3:15 p.m. November 14; and 12:30 and 7 p.m. on November 17. The documentary is an intimate, deeply moving tribute to American troops recently killed during Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Letters from SPC Michelle M. Witmer of New Berlin will be read aloud.

From the troops' hometowns, family members of eight men and two women read their loved ones' poignant and extremely eloquent final letters, some of which were not received until after news of

the troops' deaths had been received. These readings are accompanied by emotional remembrances and insights from grieving wives, mothers, fathers, children and friends, and punctuated by photos supplied by the families, as well as The New York Times, which produced the documentary with HBO in association with LIFE Books.

In an effort to reach as many Americans as possible with this tribute, HBO and participating cable affiliates will open its signal during the telecast, making the program available to almost all cable households, not just pay-cable subscribers.



Surprise!

And that it was last Monday as Ken Lee, MD, walked through the doors of the Medical Center after being deployed to Iraq in December of 2003. Outside of his medical expertise and leadership ability, Dr. Lee is known for his Lego block collection. He is seen checking possible damage on his AV-8B Harrier jump jet incurred in his absence with Farhad Sepahpanah, MD. Dr. Sepahpanah is temporarily occupying Dr. Lee's office and admits to occasionally "playing" with the collection.

Dr. Lee is the chief of the Medical Center's spinal cord injury unit, and Lt. Col. Lee is commander of Company B of the 118th Area Support Medical Battalion, Wisconsin Army National Guard, Co B, in Waukesha, WI.

He was injured on September 12 in Baghdad and then evacuated to Washington, DC. He is now home on convalescent leave and is working with his five-year-old son on a recently purchased Lego Sea Wolf nuclear submarine. Welcome home and thank you.



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The community relations office publishes *5000 West* bi-weekly as a channel of communication for employees, volunteers, patients and friends. *5000 West* is committed to enhancing the image of the Medical Center and its employees and volunteers through information, recognition and entertainment.

Articles of interest are welcome. The editor reserves the right to use and edit contributed stories. Submission deadline is two days prior to publication. Your comments are encouraged and should be directed to editor (00Z) *5000 West*, VA Medical Center, Milwaukee, WI 53295: telephone (414) 382-5363 or (888) 469-6614, extension 45363 or e-mail john.zewiske@med.va.gov

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